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Viewing cable 06BUENOSAIRES2123, ARGENTINA: CLOSE KIRCHNER ASSOCIATE ON U.S. AND

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06BUENOSAIRES2123	2006-09-18 20:48	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Buenos Aires

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1361157-la-relacion-con-chavez-al-desnudo>

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUENOS AIRES 002123

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: CLOSE KIRCHNER ASSOCIATE ON U.S. AND
VENEZUELA RELATIONS AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

REF: BUENOS AIRES 01901

Classified By: CDA, a.i., Michael Matera, Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On September 11, Charge and Poloffs (notetakers) met with Congressman and longtime Kirchner associate Carlos Kunkel that included a wide-ranging discussion on bilateral relations, Venezuela and Argentine politics. Kunkel noted that the GOA has many points of cooperation with the USG and said that Argentina appreciates the help the U.S. provided the country during the economic crisis. Turning to Venezuela, Kunkel emphasized the economic nature of the GOA's relationship with the Chavez government. On domestic politics, Kunkel lamented the lack of a viable opposition in Argentina and defended the GOA's use of public works funds. The meeting closed with the Charge providing Kunkel a copy of Ambassador Wayne's congressional testimony, and Kunkel expressing confidence that Ambassador Wayne would be a good Ambassador. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On September 11, Charge and Poloffs (notetakers) met with Congressman and longtime Kirchner associate Carlos Kunkel that included a wide-ranging discussion on bilateral relations, Venezuela and Argentine politics. Carlos Kunkel has a close relationship with President Nestor Kirchner that stretches back more than 30 years. Kunkel notes that he was Kirchner's first employer when Kirchner entered law school in La Plata in the early 1970s where Kunkel was an upperclassman. Kunkel is associated with the more radical left-wing side of the Kirchner movement and was responsible for managing First Lady Cristina Kirchner's Senate campaign in Buenos Aires province during last October's elections. Kunkel began the discussion by welcoming the Charge back to

Argentina and highlighting the importance of a good dialogue between the two governments, despite any differences that might exist. Charge replied that the USG was very pleased with the fluid dialogue that existed with the GOA.

13. (SBU) Kunkel noted that the GOA has many points of cooperation with the USG and Kunkel said that Argentina appreciates the help the U.S. provided the country during Argentina's economic crisis. Kunkel said that the GOA has great respect for the U.S. and that "you will not see officially-backed demonstrations in the street directed against the U.S." Kunkel said that he and his colleagues do not want to publicly comment on the bilateral relationship and prefer to leave those matters to the professionals in the Foreign Ministry. Kunkel also noted that the U.S. naturally has a much larger role in the world than Argentina and that Argentina does not want to meddle in any other country's domestic affairs.

14. (SBU) Turning to Venezuela, Kunkel emphasized the economic nature of the GOA's relationship with the Chavez government. "If someone offers us a better price for our bonds, we will go with them, much the same as I imagine you would stop buying Venezuelan oil and go with another supplier if you could get a better price." Kunkel downplayed the ideological nature of the GOA-GOV relationship, saying that the Venezuelan style of democracy and politics is very different from that of Argentina. Kunkel said that in particular, the use of political violence would never be accepted in Argentina. "We do not base our relations on ideology. For example, we were among the first to support Uruguay's Tabare Vazquez when he was running for President, but when the controversy arose regarding the paper mills, we defended the rights of the affected residents against the Uruguayan government."

15. (SBU) Moving to domestic politics, Kunkel lamented the lack of a viable opposition in Argentina. "It would be better if the 20-25 percent of the population that does not

agree with us had leaders that actually represented them."" Kunkel said that opposition leaders like former President Raul Alfonsin and Republican Proposal (PRO) leader Ricardo Lopez Murphy lack public support. ""In the last elections, Lopez Murphy came in fifth place in Buenos Aires province,

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and yet he complains that President Kirchner does not consult with him. Would Bush consult with someone who came in fifth in some U.S. state before he made a decision?"" Kunkel also said that Alfonsin has no right to accuse Kirchner of destroying the opposition Radical Civic Union (UCR).

""Alfonsin has run the UCR for 30 years. Under Alfonsin's leadership, the party went from winning 52 percent of the vote in 1983 to 2 percent of the vote in 2003, all before Kirchner came to office.""

16. (SBU) Kunkel defended the GOA's management of public works contracts, arguing that the funds are equitably distributed. ""I was in Alfonsin's hometown of Chascomus the other day helping to inaugurate a large new public housing project. The UCR mayor, who is not aligned with us, was taking credit for the whole project. In fact, all of the funds came from the national government.""

17. (SBU) Turning to the subject of the arrival of Ambassador Wayne, Charge provided a copy of Ambassador Wayne's congressional testimony to Kunkel. (Note: Carlos Kunkel was one of the main Kirchner allies who reacted negatively to reports of Ambassador Wayne's testimony during his congressional confirmation hearings, and Kunkel publicly accused Ambassador Wayne of defending former President Carlos Menem's policies, based on inaccurate local press reports of Wayne's testimony. End Note.) Kunkel said that he had no doubt that Ambassador Wayne would be a good Ambassador, and he looked forward to continued good relations with the U.S. Embassy.

18. (C) COMMENT: The meeting with Carlos Kunkel followed a familiar script used by all of Kirchner's officials -- speak nicely to U.S. diplomats in private while criticizing the U.S. or U.S. policy in public. In Kunkel's case, it is even more difficult to believe. Kunkel, an ex-Montonero, has been a prominent participant or organizer in nearly every leftist demonstration that has enjoyed tacit Casa Rosada support during the last three years, from the Counter-Summit at Mar del Plata last November, to the piquetero march against Juan Carlos Blumberg two weeks ago. As Kunkel indicated, however, it is better to have a fluid dialogue, despite the disagreements, than to have disagreements with poor communication. We will continue to engage Carlos Kunkel from time to time to ensure that his disagreements with the U.S. are voiced privately, and not to the Argentine press. END COMMENT.

MATERA

=====CABLE ENDS=====